

Discussion Starter I, Discussion Techniques

Learning by doing is an important axiom for extension workers. We measure our success at teaching new skills or practices in terms of the number who adopt these new methods. Similarly, a good measure of how well a group is learning new ideas and developing keener intellects is shown by how well they are discussing issues and problems among themselves. Since we can learn more about the problems of people by listening to them talk rather than to our own speeches, we should be interested in finding as many ways as possible for getting people to think and talk through their own problems. Progressive educators everywhere acclaim discussion as an efficient and effective method of fundamental teaching. Try it! Here are a number of tested receipts for talking over our problems together.

1. GROUP DISCUSSION

The group should be small enough in number to give everybody a chance to talk in the time allowed and to understand the points of view of one another. They try to focus every point of view, information available, and the members' experience on the topic under consideration. The topic should be a genuine problem or issue with which the group members have some acquaintance. The aim is to attain more complete judgment for the individual and the group. It may result in action, individual, or group, soon or in due time, depending upon the circumstances. A frequent procedure includes:

- (a) A brief organization session and "charge to the jury" by the discussion manager.
- (b) Break up into discussion groups of 20 to 40 persons with a group leader in charge.
- (c) Divide further into small "huddles" of 5 to 7 where everyone talks over the problems. Often "talk starters" or "agree-disagree" statements are used here.
- (d) Reconvene as a group and arrive at a "consensus opinion".

Committees, conferences, and regular 4-H organization meetings can improve teaching or learning methods by making more use of discussion groups. The leader talks only to stimulate and guide. Be sure to get acquainted first. Arrange an informal atmosphere. Keep speakers and consultants "on tap" not on top.

* Compiled by E. W. Aiton, Field Agent, Eastern States, Extension Service, USDA for Texas 4-H Club Round-Up, September 2 to 5, 1947. Important sections were originally prepared by J. P. Schmidt, Rural Sociology Extension, Ohio State University.

2. FORUM MEETING

Ordinarily there is an audience to whom a speaker or speakers, as authorities, present the problem, and the question period following is guided by a presiding chairman. Especially suitable for large audiences interested in current issues or for the introduction of new information or programs to a group - America's Town Meeting, Institutes, County and Community Meetings. Watch out for windy persons!

3. PANEL

This is suitable for introducing new topics to large audiences, especially by using panel members who have opposing points of view or different sources of information. The chairman must watch the time, see that the issue is not lost, and see that all panel members get a fair hearing, especially in the questions that follow any brief presentations. Rehearsed panels frequently fall flat. If rehearsal is essential talk over only the ideas or phases of the program that will be brought up by the panel.

4. COMBINATION OF SPEAKER, DISCUSSION

GROUPS AND PANEL

Especially suitable for conference bodies; good for policy forming and giving everybody a chance to talk is this method of:

- (a) Hearing the speaker present the topic, brief and challenging -- never over 30 minutes.
- (b) Having small discussion groups consider what was said and make recommendations, or ask questions for further clarification or new ones in the field for opinion, and
- (c) Bring these back to the speaker in a forum, and before the whole assembly for consideration.

The presiding chairman must watch the clock, see that every group gets a turn to speak or ask a question (although some may "pass") and "handle" the speaker, i.e., see that he does not ride one hobby, also protect him as a friendly informer with human limitations. Coach the speaker to bring out issues and stimulate rather than deliver a speech in the opening presentation!

5. RADIO ROUNDTABLE

The radio serves as the medium for reaching a widely scattered general audience by having three or four persons hold an informal, little rehearsed discussion on a current problem or program. The roundtable group must know the main points to be covered in the allotted time, and the leader must keep an eye on the clock, and see that transitions are made from point to point as naturally as possible. Instruct all members to permit nobody to make a speech. Keep interrupting one another. The leader or chairman will see that all do not talk at once.

6. SYMPORIUM

Much like the panel, with perhaps more care in selecting specialized authorities for their contributions and less concern about time for questions by the audience.

7. THE "HEARING"

An illustration best describes this method: "The Consumer vs. Production Control." Each side presents witnesses and the judge or referee makes a decision with a summary of both sides and recommendations.

8. "CLINIC"

The experts hear a "case", diagnose and prescribe before the audience. A "delinquent" family, mistreating the farm.

9. DRAMATIZED DISCUSSIONS (PANELS OR OTHERS)

The "speaker" is shortly interrupted from the floor and the chairman permits the interruption but calls the objector to the front. No sooner does the objector get a fair start than he, too, is interrupted. The chairman insists that the first interrupter take a seat by the "speaker" who now takes a seat although plainly irritated, or apparently pleased with the prospect of a good "fight". In a short time three or four interruptors are seated to make a panel with the "speaker's" consent.

Another form, THE PUBLIC CONVERSATION, begins as the "host" enters a "living room" with a friend in vigorous conversation. Others come in and take part.

10. "PROFESSOR QUIZ"

Use the questions brought in by discussion groups, but have two teams and a judge. Always give the audience a chance after the first miss.

11. DEBATE

Of questionable educational value except for the new facts that may be unearthed and presented. There is too much tendency to take sides and listen only to "our side".

12. SOCIO-DRAMA

The coach reads or explains a social problem, involving several people. Volunteers to act and speak the parts of these characters are called for from the audience. Each "acts out" the behavior of one person, as he himself "feels" the problem warrants. The coach may whisper ideas to members of the cast and should be alert to change scenes, close one episode and open a new one, etc., as the drama unfolds. At a critical point, the coach may switch characters from one to another "actor" (to impress the point that there is probably more than one side to the problem). At the end (stop at the "peak of interest") the coach calls for a brief audience participation.

This method is entertaining, easily staged, and highly educational, especially for upper teen-agers who like action and possess considerable imagination.

13. THE PROBLEM OR CASE-HISTORY APPROACH

The speaker or discussion leader hands out and reads a specific problem or "word picture", specially selected to stimulate a searching analysis of motives, basic issues, and best procedures for solution. He then starts asking the audience questions designed to start discussion from the floor. (See Individual Problems I and II, attached.)

14. THE PICTOGRAPH OR ILLUSTRATED DISCUSSION-PRIMER

The stimulating device here is a picture or series of them which illustrate alternatives and ideas with which the audience "agree" or "disagree". The kind of questions that the leader asks will decide how much discussion arises. Usually they should be provocative or make the audience "just a little mad" so they want to talk back. Soon they will talk back and forth to one another rather than to the leader. (See charts, "The Local Leader's Relationship to the 4-H Club", and the leaflet, "Keeping High School Youth in 4-H Clubs").

For Discussion Use Only

Jack, Individual Problem I

Jack is 18; he dropped out of high school 3 years ago. His father needed him on the farm, and his grades were not very good anyway. He is strong, healthy, and a good worker. He never had much time to belong to any organization except a science club at school that he liked very much.

There is very little recreation or social activity in Jack's rural community. Besides, he is not much of a hand to push himself into group activity and does not know how to dance. Once or twice a week he and a few other fellows meet at the crossroads night spot and watch the activity. A few of the other boys drink a little. He goes to church Sundays.

A former member of their little group has gone to the city and writes back that he has a good job, regular hours, and 85 cents per hour at the start. Jack has been thinking a lot lately about joining his city friend, but his parents need him, they say. They think he would be very ungrateful for all their parental kindness if he left them now in their later years. Jack doesn't see much future on their farm.

Are there any Jacks in _____ County?

What has he missed in his formative period?

What are his most important problems now?

What is in his future if he stays? If he leaves?

Can the Extension Service help in his case?

What kind of Extension program does he need?

For Discussion Use Only

Mary, Individual Problem II

Mary is 14 and quite shy. Although of normal health, looks, mentality, and family background, she does not mix freely with others her own age. For pleasure she reads a lot, mostly fiction but some biography. She dreams that she will some day sail away from her small-town community and become a great lady of wealth and culture. Her mother and father are of average means who have struggled hard to raise the family and "protect them from some of the hard work and worries" which they themselves always had to struggle against.

The teachers say that Mary could get much better marks if she would apply herself more diligently. Mary thinks most of her teachers are impractical, and she does only as much work as she is required to.

Is Mary likely to become a great and wealthy lady?

If her present attitude continues will she be happy?

What is Mary missing as she grows up?

How could a good 4-H Club help her?

Do you know any Marys in _____ County?

What action should a local or county 4-H Club leader take?

Discussion Starter II. "Group Discussions" *

Write "A" before the statement if you agree, "D" if you disagree. Each "huddle" records "consensus opinion" for the group as a whole. Do not restrict your talks to these statements, but brouse over the entire topic.

1. Main job of the discussion leader is to give correct answers if opinions differ.
2. The aim of group discussion is to bring new facts into existence.
3. Every good discussion should lead to some action.
4. No one person should be permitted to talk more than a minute during a discussion.
5. Thirty or forty people is about the maximum size for a discussion group.
6. A good way to begin is to call on each participant to comment on the topic.
7. Avoid controversial subjects.
8. Members should ask the leader for the floor before starting to speak.
9. Be sure to establish a time limit for each person's remarks.
10. The discussion leader doesn't need to know very much about the topic.
11. Reference materials should be given each participant as the talks start.
12. Some kinds of extension teaching cannot be done by the discussion method.
13. The discussion starters are a kind of true - false test.
14. Groups should be restricted to a fairly uniform age and a common interest.
15. If erroneous statements are made the leader should correct them.
16. Expressing one's views on current problems is an important responsibility of citizenship.
17. To measure results ask for a show of "pros" and "cons" before and after discussion of an issue.

*Compiled by E. W. Aiton, Field Agent, Eastern States, Extension Service, U.S.D.A., for Texas 4-H Club Round-Up, College Station, Texas, September 3 to 5, 1947.

Joining Friends - - - for Work "

Discussion Starter III - for 4-H Members

1. Now that the war is over 4-H members no longer need to grow crops and livestock, preserve food, make and remodel garments, etc.
2. Actually developing a result demonstration that is of a high standard is more important than attending club meetings.
3. Keeping a year-round 4-H Club going is more trouble than its worth.
4. How well a person takes responsibility in his own club is a better test of his citizenship than whether or not he votes for public officers.
5. The purpose of 4-H Club work is to teach boys about farming and girls about homemaking.
6. Four-H work is wasted when boys leave the farm for urban employment.
7. There are 4,823 4-H Clubs in Texas and most of them are model units of "democracy in action".
8. Membership in our 4-H Clubs is open to all boys and girls 10 to 21 years of age.
9. If members of a 4-H Club wanted to they could:
 - a. Promote better health in the community.
 - b. Resurrect a "near-dead" rural church.
 - c. Organize and conduct a community recreation program for everybody.
 - d. Run all other organizations out of the community.
10. There is a value in working for the sake of work itself.
11. Rural youth and Urban youth have much in common.
12. A young person with normal talents and health can succeed at anything if he makes up his mind to.
13. Club members can do a better job of choosing their local leader than parents or the county extension agent.
14. If a club fails it's the member's fault.
15. Hard work is more important than influential friends in getting ahead.
16. An only son, who will inherit the farm, is morally obligated to stay on the farm and help his parents.
17. If more girls had a chance to earn a personal income on the farm more of them would stay there.
18. Every boy and girl in Texas should have a chance to join a 4-H Club.

"Joining With Friends - - - for Work"

Discussion Starter IV - for 4-H Leaders

If you agree, write "A" before the statement. If you disagree, write "D".

- ____ 1. The purpose of 4-H Club work is to teach boys about farming and girls about homemaking.
- ____ 2. Now that the war is over 4-H members no longer need to grow crops and livestock, preserve food, make and remodel garments, etc.
- ____ 3. Actually developing a result demonstration that is of a high standard is more important than attending club meetings.
- ____ 4. Keeping a year-round 4-H Club going is more trouble than it's worth.
- ____ 5. Four-H work is waster when boys leave the farm for urban employment.
- ____ 6. How well a person takes responsibility in his own club is a better test of his citizenship than whether or not he votes for public officers.
- ____ 7. There are 4,823 4-H Clubs in Texas and most of them are model units of "democracy in action".
- ____ 8. A standard 4-H Club should confine its work and activities to the State outline in order that it may qualify for awards or recognition.
- ____ 9. When a club fails it is usually the leader's fault.
- ____ 10. The same program of 4-H projects and club activities can be used for 10 and 20-year-old 4-H members.
- ____ 11. If members of a 4-H Club wanted to they could:
 - ____ a. Promote better health in the community.
 - ____ b. Resurrect a "near-dead" rural church.
 - ____ c. Organize and conduct a community recreation program for everybody.
 - ____ d. Run all other organizations out of the community.
- ____ 12. If a choice is to be made between work and fun at club meetings, better leave out the recreation.
- ____ 13. A club of 20 members with 100% completion is doing a better job than a club of 30 members with only 25 completions.
- ____ 14. Adults have more ability than young people and therefore should do most of the community-service work.
- ____ 15. There are too many different organizations for young people.
- ____ 16. Always pick the most popular member as officers of a club.
- ____ 17. There is value in bringing teen-agers together for a conference or trip even though no subject matter is taught.
- ____ 18. Most young people have inferiority complexes.
- ____ 19. There is no juvenile delinquency. The real problem is parent delinquency
- ____ 20. Every boy and girl in Texas should have an opportunity to join a 4-H Club

"Joining With Friends --- for Fun and Fellowship

Discussion Starter V - for 4-H members

If you agree, write "A" before the statement. If you disagree, write "D".

1. Farm boys and girls have more fun than their city cousins.
2. Young people are interested mostly in fun and recreation.
3. The games and sociability at a 4-H Club meeting are mostly "bait" so the members will come for project instruction.
4. It's best for a club to have the same recreation leader all year.
5. Singing together is really fun, not just a "fill in" on the program.
6. The main reason youth leave the farm for the city is that there is more entertainment there.
7. Every young person should excel at some vigorous sport.
8. One reason for the large number of mentally unadjusted men of draft age in rural areas was that they work too much alone.
9. Six months or a year of military training is a good thing for boys and girls.
10. There is not enough chance for youth to take part in community affairs.
11. Most rural organizations would be better if they had some young members and officers.
12. Teen-age 4-H members should meet together even if no subject-matter information is taught.
13. Suburban living for city workers is a good thing and should be encouraged.
14. Cultural advantages of the city offset the freedoms of farm life.
15. The best 4-H meetings always have a speaker as the main feature.
16. Most disadvantages of rural living could be overcome by rural people themselves. List those that cannot.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

"Joining With Friends - - - for Fun and Fellowship"

Discussion Starter VI - for 4-H Leaders

If you agree, write "A" before the statement. If you disagree, write "D".

- ____ 1. Young people are interested mostly in fun and recreation.
- ____ 2. The games and sociability at a 4-H Club meeting are mostly "bait" so the members will come for project instruction.
- ____ 3. The main reason youth leave the farm for the city is that there is more entertainment there.
- ____ 4. Every young person should excel at some vigorous sport.
- ____ 5. One reason for the large number of mentally unadjusted men of draft age in rural areas was that they work too much alone.
- ____ 6. There is not enough chance for youth to take part in community affairs.
- ____ 7. Adults do everything they can to encourage youth participation in farm organizations.
- ____ 8. The best 4-H meetings always have a speaker as the main feature.
- ____ 9. The best 4-H leader usually devotes the most hours to club work.
- ____ 10. Teen-age 4-H members should meet together even if no subject-matter information is taught.
- ____ 11. Health is an individual's concern rather than a problem of society.
- ____ 12. Rural schools should train more in the field of rural living.
- ____ 13. The rural school should be the social as well as educational center of the community.
- ____ 14. Some parents have no interest in their children and therefore will not cooperate with the 4-H Club leader.
- ____ 15. Youth cannot lead youth effectively.
- ____ 16. Youth's most important responsibility is to become economically self-sufficient and socially acceptable.

Discussion Starter VII, "4-H Club Objectives and Program" *

As a group write "A" before the statement if you agree. Write "D" if you disagree.

- ____ 1. The primary purpose of 4-H work is to teach boys and girls facts about farming and homemaking.
- ____ 2. Every boy or girl in the State enrolled in the same project should do the same things.
- ____ 3. A club that has 20 members with 100% completion is doing a better job than one with 30 members but only 25 complete their projects.
- ____ 4. The best county agent does the least teaching to Club members.
- ____ 5. Most 4-H clubs in Texas are models of democratic action.
- ____ 6. If 4-H members really wanted to do something about it they could:
 - _____ a. Revive a dying rural church.
 - _____ b. Organize and conduct a community recreation program
 - _____ c. Build a community meeting and recreation center.
 - _____ d. Run out all other youth organizations from the area
- ____ 7. The real head of 4-H work so far as members are concerned is:
 - (a) M. L. Wilson, Extension Service, USDA _____
 - (b) G. L. Noble, Director, National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work, Chicago _____
 - (c) Thomas E. Wilson, Chairman, National Committee on Boys and Girls Club Work, Chicago _____
 - (d) I. P. Trotter, Director of Extension, College Station, _____
 - (e) The county extension agent _____
 - (f) The local leader _____
 - (g) The members themselves, thru their club organization _____
- ____ 8. It is not practical to attempt a program that fits both 10 year olds and 18 year olds in the same 4-H Club.
- ____ 9. Ideally we should have a separate 4-H program for each age, as the schools do.
- ____ 10. Better to keep standards high and eliminate the lazy youth rather than to lower the achievement standards.
- ____ 11. A properly organized club could run itself without an adult leader.
- ____ 12. Leaders do not ask parents to do as much for 4-H as most parents would be willing to do.
- ____ 13. The best place for a club meeting is in:
 - _____ (a) The leader's home
 - _____ (b) The member's homes
 - _____ (c) A community building
 - _____ (d) The school
- ____ 14. Asking 4-H members to do 4-H chores is doing them a favor.
- ____ 15. The best way to keep parents interested in club work is to ask each member to tell his parents about it.
- ____ 16. A county Extension agent should attend at least half of the Club meetings
- ____ 17. The main reason for ineffective leadership is failure on our part to give them challenging jobs that they can do.